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Policing Perestroika: The Indispensable KGB by Alexander J. Motyl

Something is afoot. For so secretive an institution, the USSR Committee of State Security, the KGB, has been getting an awfully large amount of publicity these days.

It all began over a year ago in April 1988, when *Argumenty i fakty* began running a regular column, "The KGB Informs and Comments." Things picked up several months later. The September 1988 issue of *Kommunist*, the theoretical journal of the Communist Party Central Committee, included a lengthy piece by a KGB researcher on the USSR's "cult of secrecy."¹ Then, on September 2, *Pravda* ran an unusually revealing interview with KGB Chairman Viktor Chebrikov.² On September 14, the Ukrainian Republic's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Union of Journalists of the Ukraine held a press conference in Kiev, at which they revealed how the KGB had infiltrated an emigré nationalist organization.³ Two weeks later, at the infamous Central Committee plenum called so unexpectedly by Mikhail Gorbachev, Vladimir Kriuchkov replaced Chebrikov as chairman, who, in turn, was placed in charge of a newly-created Central Committee Commission on Legal Policy.⁴

On December 16, the army newspaper *Krasnaia zvezda* published an interview with Vasili Sergeev, the reputed

head of the KGB's military branch.⁵ In early February 1989, *Nedelia* featured an article entitled "A Day's Work at the Committee of State Security."⁶ The circle closed in the spring. On May 31, Iurii Vlasov, a member of the new Soviet Congress, publicly denounced the KGB. And in early June, Kriuchkov — who had previously endorsed *glasnost'* — suggested that the Supreme Soviet should have oversight over the KGB.⁷ So much exposure for so shadowy an organization is unusual, to say the least. What are we to make of these goings-on?

Answering this question without descending into the murky world of Kremlinology is no mean feat, since the Sovietological literature has virtually nothing to say about the secret police as an integral participant in the system. Some authors in the field have devoted attention to the KGB: John Barron wrote about the KGB's cloak-and-dagger activities, and Peter Reddaway touched upon the KGB in his discussions of human rights and dissidents.⁸ By and large, however, few observers of the USSR attempt to incorporate the security police into an overall analysis of the Soviet system.⁹

Why this curious oversight? Lack of data cannot explain it, because data are sparse for all Soviet institutions, while

1 V. A. Rubanov, "Ot kul'ta sekretnosti" — k informatsionnoi kul'ture," *Kommunist*, No. 13 (September 1988), pp. 24-36.

2 "Perestroika i rabota chekistov. Chlen Politbiuro TsK KPSS, predsedatel' KGB SSSR V. M. Chebrikov otvechaet na voprosy *Pravdy*," *Pravda*, September 2, 1988, pp. 1, 3.

3 "Prorakhuvalysh"! Z pres-konferentsii v Kyievi pro pidryvnu diial'nist' ZCh OUN (t.zv. zakordonnykh chasty orhanizatsii ukrains'kykh natsionalistiv)," *Visti z Ukrayiny*, No. 39, September 1988, p. 7.

4 "Ob obrazovanii komissii TsK KPSS i reorganizatsii apparata TsK KPSS v svete reshenii XIX Vsesoiuznoi partiinoi konferentsii," *Kommunist*, No. 15 (October 1988), p. 4.

5 Viktor Yasmann, "Military Branch of KGB Goes Public," *Report on the USSR*, January 13, 1989, pp. 4-5.

6 *Nedelia*, January 30 - February 5, 1989, pp. 11-13.

7 *Izvestia*, May 5, 1989; *The New York Times*, May 7, 1989, p. A21, and June 2, 1989, pp. A1, A8.

8 See John Barron, *The KGB* (New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1974); Peter Reddaway, "Policy towards Dissent since Khrushchev," in T. H. Rigby et al., eds., *Authority, Power and Policy in the USSR* (London: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 158-92.

9 The exceptions are Amy W. Knight, *The KGB: Police and Politics in the Soviet Union* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988); Astrid von Borcke, *KGB. Die Macht im Untergrund* (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hanssler Verlag, 1987); Robert Conquest, *Inside Stalin's Secret Police: NKVD Politics, 1936-39* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1985); Jonathan R. Adelman, "Soviet Secret Police," in Jonathan R. Adelman, ed., *Terror and Communist Politics: The Role of the Secret Police in Communist States* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1984), pp. 79-133; Frederick C. Barghoorn, "The Security Police," in H. Gordon Skilling and Franklyn Griffiths, eds., *Interest Groups in Soviet Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 93-129.



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samizdat, emigré writings, dissident memoirs, Soviet popular fiction, and defectors constitute untapped and unparalleled sources of information. More likely, the scholarly avoidance of the KGB is rooted in the profession's current predilections, foremost of which is its wholesale rejection of the so-called totalitarian model.¹⁰ The purging of this concept from the Sovietological imagination seems to have spurred scholars to the following conclusion: since the Soviet system is not totalitarian, then terror, violence, and coercion — all the nasty things associated with the secret police — must be of little or no relevance to explaining how the system works and what holds it together. Deceptively straightforward at first glance, this syllogism breaks down upon closer inspection. Terror, violence, and coercion are disparate notions: terror is the indiscriminate mass application of violence and coercion; violence is brute force; coercion is the threat of violence. Clearly, the abolition of terror need not entail the disappearance of violence and coercion. Quite the contrary, one can easily imagine coercion replacing terror as a regime's primary means for controlling society.

The rejection of coercion moves scholars to seek the sources of Soviet stability in political culture. What is left if the system is manifestly not delivering the goods and its ideology is so painfully contorted? It must be that Soviet citizens in general and Russians in particular possess authoritarian inclinations, because only such people could tolerate so patently repressive a system. Interestingly, Soviet scholars also find the political culture approach useful, especially in explaining Stalinism, because it displaces the onus of the terror from the authorities onto the populace.¹¹

Since about 1986, however, things look rather different. As repression has faded and thousands of hitherto passive Soviet citizens have rushed to fill their lives with something approximating democratic content, the political culture argument suddenly appears much less persuasive. Indeed, it is hard not to draw the conclusion that coercion, as much as anything else, stood in the way of popular activism during the "period of stagnation" and that Russians, like most people everywhere, were not culturally programmed to worship father figures. Discussing coercion need not mean a revival of the totalitarian model, but it does necessitate a heightened appreciation of the Soviet system's repressive capacities — and that means the KGB.

Institutionalization of the KGB

Founded in late 1917 as the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Suppression of Counterrevolution,

10 See Alexander J. Motyl, "Bringing the USSR Back In: Comparative Research Agendas and the Necessity of a Totalitarian Type," unpublished paper, 1988.

11 For Soviet views, see Thomas Sherlock, "Politics and History under Gorbachev," *Problems of Communism*, Nos. 3-4 (May-August 1988), p. 37.

12 Ilya Dzhirkvelov, *Secret Servant: My Life with the KGB and the Soviet Elite* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987).

Sabotage, and Speculation (or Vecheka), the Soviet secret police enjoyed a variety of acronyms — GPU, OGPU, NKVD, NKGB, MGB — until 1954, when it was named the KGB. Notwithstanding such permutations in nomenclature, Chekists, as they are lovingly called by the Soviet popular press, have always remained true to the Vecheka's original mandate — to shield the state from its internal and external enemies. To be sure, their actual prerogatives have been fluid, widening or narrowing as circumstances, and the central authorities, have required. Chekists were the cutting edge of Soviet power during the Civil War, and the Red Terror was crucial to Bolshevik victory. During the relatively tranquil years of the New Economic Policy in the 1920s, the secret police refocused its energies on emigrés, interventionists, and recalcitrant Party factions. With Stalin's ascension to and consolidation of power, the police underwent a major transformation, from a secondary actor into a leading force in Soviet political and social life. In time, the security organs became a state within the state whose activities were above the law, a condition typified by the NKVD's notorious Special Boards. Following Stalin's death, however, the dictator's successors decisively curbed the security organs: Lavrentii Beria was executed, police ranks were purged, and powers were greatly circumscribed. The organization experienced a resurgence of influence in the Brezhnev years, a trend that culminated in KGB head Iurii Andropov's elevation to Party General Secretary after Brezhnev's death. Still, despite a stab at what some dissidents termed neo-Stalinism, the KGB's terroristic practices remained buried among other "relics of the past."

Although the KGB remains an exceptional institution, even by Soviet standards, its development into an agency of the state, and not above the state, has had a profound effect on the manner in which it functions. KGB work is no longer the extraordinary task that it was during the Civil War or the Stalin period. One can trace this evolution in the remarkable memoirs of Ilya Dzhirkvelov, an unrepentant Chekist who joined the NKVD as a youthful enthusiast during the Great Patriotic War (World War II) and defected as a dissatisfied and sullen bureaucrat in 1980.¹² As Dzhirkvelov's career suggests, secret police work has become routinized. The institution has become part and parcel of the post-Stalinist political system; KGB work has become a stable element of that system's functioning and self-maintenance.

Along with routinization, the KGB has become professionalized; indeed, it has probably become the professional equal of the intelligence and security agencies of Western countries. Although the Committee of State Security continues its predecessors' tradition of getting the job done, the

KGB's current manner of protecting the Soviet system is far more nuanced, skillful, and, perhaps most important, efficient than in the past. Terror, which is a costly and unsophisticated approach to the problem of political-societal control, has been replaced with modern-day police techniques, repression by means of "surgical strikes," and a complex pattern of penetrating society and its institutions, even religious ones such as the Russian Orthodox Church.¹³ The KGB's style has also changed. There is some truth to the Brezhnev-era hoopla that glorified Chekist heroism in films, television programs, and novels by incessantly trumpeting secret policemen as, well, doctors of sorts, as mere idealists who were dedicated to the health of society and sincerely believed that an ounce of prevention really was worth a pound of cure. Chebrikov made this point nicely in the *Pravda* interview:

Great importance... is attached to preventive work, the chief purpose of which is the timely prevention of crimes against the state and other anti-social actions that affect state security interests. This area of Chekists' work, more than any other, is fully in keeping with the spirit of the democratization taking place in our country. For this is a matter of struggling for a person who is on the brink of committing a crime against the state. To help a person who has gone astray dispel his delusions and grasp the relationship between the interests of the individual and the interests of society, the interests of the citizen and the interests of the state, and to reveal the better qualities in that person — that, it seems to me, is one of the most honorable and rewarding aspects of Chekists' work.¹⁴

The upshot of these two processes is that the KGB has become institutionalized, in political scientist Samuel P. Huntington's sense of the term. Firmly positioned within the Soviet political system, the secret police is characterized by what Huntington terms adaptability, autonomy, complexity, and coherence.¹⁵ Adaptable to the political demands of post-Stalinism and post-Brezhnevism, more or less independent of all but the highest-level Party leaders, decidedly complex in its structure and functioning, and unquestionably coherent with regard to its organization and procedures, the KGB has acquired a stake within the system, a within-system identity, and specific corporate interests. As the KGB has acquired a "secure niche in Soviet politics," the USSR has been transformed — from a Stalinist system into a well-ordered police state, or *Polizeistaat*.¹⁶

Secret police cadres have undergone a parallel transformation since the heady days of Stalin's brutal NKVD. From a collection of visionaries, thugs, and war criminals, KGB agents increasingly have come to be recruited from the country's sizeable pool of well-educated and relatively

polished careerists who use the Committee — and its many perquisites and high salary — as a means for social advancement. Dissidents, for instance, are virtually unanimous in describing their KGB interrogators as intelligent, smooth, and pleasant interlocutors,¹⁷ and defector Arkady Shevchenko testifies that one can always distinguish operatives from normal diplomats by their good clothes, self-assurance, and openness (a disturbing thought for Western scholars who seek contacts with their Soviet counterparts and would prefer not to be unwitting participants in intelligence intrigues).¹⁸ The KGB currently consists of the USSR's best and brightest. As Chebrikov put it:

People come to us... on the recommendation of Party and Young Communist League Organizations. Most of them have a higher education. Their records include work experience, service in the Soviet Army, and experience in public-service and Party work. For understandable reasons, our selection process is a rigorous one. In this regard, special attention is devoted to ensuring that people who come to work in our agencies have well-developed intellects, high moral standards, and a high degree of ideological staunchness.¹⁹

The KGB and the Party

Despite the secret police's relatively recent transformation into a systemically institutionalized actor, one strand of its web of political relationships has changed little since 1917. Except for the brief period following Stalin's death, when Beria vied for absolute power, the secret police has always been subordinate to the highest Party authorities — whether defined as an individual, a clique, a collective leadership, or institution — and followed their dictates. There is no question that the *Veccheka* was the Party's instrument and that its head, Feliks Dzerzhinskii, was Lenin's man. Stalin and his entourage utilized the NKVD against all levels of the Party-state bureaucracy: the terror was their doing, and not that of wild-eyed agents or, what is even less likely, of the masses. The argument for elite manipulation becomes even stronger after Stalin's death. It was Khrushchev & Co. who abandoned terror, and it was Brezhnev and his fellow oligarchs who revived coercion against society along with some measure of violence against especially troublesome dissidents and political prisoners. In each of these shifts, leaders were responding to institutional and social pressures, but the policy choices were theirs, and not those of "society."

13 See the samizdat document, "The KGB, the Moscow Patriarch, and the State of the Russian Orthodox Church," *Glasnost*, Nos. 13-15 (October 1988), p. 2.

14 *Pravda*, September 2, 1988, p. 1, as translated by *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, No. 35, September 28, 1988, p. 2.

15 Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 12-24.

16 Adelman, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

17 See Knight, *op. cit.*, pp. 194-95.

18 Arkady Shevchenko, *Breaking with Moscow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), p. 241.

19 *Pravda*, September 2, 1988, p. 1; *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, September 28, 1988, p. 1.

The KGB's official relationship with the Party authorities reflects this formally subordinate role. Although the Committee of State Security is a government institution, it appears to be directly beholden to the Party Politburo and Secretariat, and not to the Council of Ministers. Moreover, republican and *oblast'*-level KGB organs are subordinate to their higher-ups in the KGB hierarchy, and not to respective Party or state authorities in the provinces.²⁰ In this manner, provincial KGB's are insulated from the influence of locals, and it is only at the center, in Moscow, that the highest Party authorities set guidelines and approve KGB activities. It is probably fair to say that all large-scale and/or important KGB actions and campaigns are either initiated or at least approved by the central Party authorities. This is not to say that the Kremlin controls the everyday actions of some KGB officer in, say, Minsk, or that the KGB's representation in the Party's decision-making bodies does not enable it to exert influence on policy choices and thus to augment its own room for maneuver.²¹

Why does the KGB enjoy local autonomy on the one hand, while being held strictly in check by the Party elite on the other? Autonomy is presumably a guarantee of its ability to act "objectively," with regard only for the genuine interests of the entire state. Strict subordination to the Kremlin is intended to ensure that the secret police remains an executor of policy, and not its initiator. Despite the semblance of KGB subordination, however, the Party's relationship with the police really resembles an alliance — of the political elite with the holders of the means of coercion.²² An alliance of this sort makes great sense, because of the Party's pretensions to a monopoly of power in the political system. Quite simply, the Party needs the KGB, because the Party could not survive as a political monopolist without some agency to prevent competitors from emerging and challenging its control of the "market" and its resources.

Yet the alliance is also fraught with danger for the Party. Although the KGB is intended to be the Party's junior partner, its centralized structure and provincial autonomy provide it with the means to obstruct Party policy. A further ace up the KGB's sleeve is that it knows how indispensable it is. In other words, the KGB can be pushed only so far, both because it is too strong and because it is too important. Party policies that slight the KGB or threaten to undermine its authority are self-contradictory and, thus, likely to be ineffective. Consequently, a genuinely radical restructuring of the Soviet system is inconceivable without at least the tacit approval of the KGB.

20 Knight, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-39.

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 79-96, 169-73.

22 For a similar analysis, see John J. Dziak, *Chekisty: A History of the KGB* (New York: Ivy Books, 1988).

23 Knight, *op. cit.*, pp. 122,226,232; John E. Carlson, "The KGB," in James Cracraft, ed., *The Soviet Union Today* (Chicago: Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 1983), pp. 82-83; John L. Scherer, ed., *USSR Facts and Figures Annual* (Gulf Breeze, Florida: Academic International Press, 1983), VII, p. 358.

Secret Police Methods

Now, as in the past, the secret police is charged with performing several key domestic tasks. First is neutralizing the state's active political opponents. Second is preventing their emergence. Third is deterring foreign subversives from carrying out their nefarious deeds in the Soviet Motherland. And fourth is preventing subversive foreign ideas from penetrating into the Soviet polity — be it via the airwaves (before jamming was halted in late 1988, Radio Liberty was the leading "pirate of the ether") or through smuggling of contraband literature. These tasks have been constant since 1917, inasmuch as the Party's monopolist aspirations have remained unchanged. Obviously, what *has* changed is the central authorities' definition of the scope of these tasks and of the means that may be used in order to execute them.

KGB resources are commensurate with the importance of its role in the system. A variety of sources estimate that KGB cadres consist of some 230,000 border troops, about 15,000 guard troops, some 150,000 technical and clerical workers, and 1,500,000 officers, plain-clothes agents, and informers. Another source calculates "KGB manpower" — which presumably does not include informers — as 490,000 in 1973 and 700,000 in 1986 (out of a population of 280,000,000). The Committee's annual budget may be in the area of five billion dollars.²³ Whatever the exact figures, and no one really knows what they are, the KGB is still a huge and well-endowed institution, despite having been proportionately far larger under Stalin, when its duties encompassed many of those currently performed by the militia.

The secret police's *modus operandi* has always been multifaceted, but the two dimensions that stood out during Stalin's times were terror and murder. The informers, denunciations, midnight knocks, trials, concentration camps, mass executions, and mass deportations have been amply described by witnesses and survivors, and there is no need to recount their horrific tales here. Suffice it to say, contemporary Soviet revelations substantiate their testimony that secret police activities during much of the Stalin period, and not just in 1937-1938, were terroristic at best and genocidal at worst, especially in such non-Russian republics as Belorussia and the Ukraine.

Fortunately for the Soviet peoples, secret police methods changed radically in the post-Stalin period. Terror was abolished, millions of prisoners were released, and arbitrary violence was halted. But coercion, in both its refined and vulgar forms, remained under Khrushchev and Brezhnev. During the era of stagnation, for example, KGB vigilance would typically manifest itself in the following

manner. The first line of defense would consist of informers who ferreted out and reported untoward behavior. Potential troublemakers would then be singled out and placed under surveillance. If questionable kinds of behavior continued, KGB agents would first attempt to reason with the problem citizen in so-called "chats." Veiled threats might be made—regarding employment, housing, career opportunities, educational chances for one's children, and so on. If the "deviant" persisted, certain threats would be carried out. Especially stubborn asocial types might get mugged by Voluntary People's Squads masquerading as hooligans. Finally, if none of these prophylactic measures worked, the dissident would be arrested — either on political grounds (anti-Soviet activity or defamation of the state) or, increasingly in the post-Helsinki era of human rights, for rape, drug abuse, or parasitism. A number of suspicious deaths of dissidents, especially in the Ukraine and the Baltic republics, suggest that even the post-Stalinist KGB had occasional recourse to Stalinist methods.²⁴

But the most daunting of the KGB's features was not its ruthlessness — after all, Soviet citizens knew what to expect from their secret police after fifty or more years — but its apparent ubiquity. All public establishments — hotels, restaurants, cafes, and bars — were popularly assumed to be bugged, and probably were. Informers were also assumed to be lodged at all levels of public life. Whether listening devices and secret collaborators, the *seksoty*, were truly all that pervasive is immaterial, since Soviet citizens not unreasonably acted on the assumption that "even the walls had ears." No wonder that open dissent was rare under such circumstances. All but truly idealistic, if not fanatical, individuals would have tailored their behavior to the regime's expectations to avoid incarceration or exile.

A sea change has taken place in the Gorbachev years, as a walk down the Arbat or a brief glance at the huge number of independent socio-political and cultural associations reveals. *Glasnost'* has expanded the bounds of the permissible to a previously unimaginable degree, most political prisoners have been released, and arrests have declined markedly. Andrei Sakharov's return from Gorky, subsequent public career, and travel to the United States in November 1988 typify the new spirit of openness and freedom. Is it possible, then, that the KGB is now idle and has nothing left to do?

The question is rhetorical and the answer, obviously, is "no." We may be certain that the KGB is acting in the

tradition of any self-respecting secret police: it is keeping close tabs on all the unofficial activity spawned by *glasnost'*. Minimally, the Committee is amassing information on the size, structure, and membership of the socio-political associations. Just as likely, its army of informers has been redeployed and is being used to infiltrate these groups. If the past is any guide to present practice, KGB operatives occupy key positions in the independent associations. Nevertheless, for the time being at least, a low profile for the KGB is the rule, except in the Ukraine.

The Ukrainian Connection

Although Vladimir Shcherbitskii's continued tenure as Ukrainian Party chief may help account for this anomaly, more persuasive as an explanation is the republic's exceptional status. A major industrial and agricultural producer, with a population of some fifty million, a territory larger than that of France, a modern elite, and a tradition of national communism and nationalism, the Ukraine is the key to the USSR's ethnic stability, the core of the KGB's security dilemmas, and the place where push generally comes to shove. KGB activity in the Ukraine, therefore, is not specific to the republic, but symptomatic of the leadership's underlying strategic concerns.²⁵

Viewed in this context, the Kiev press conference assumes a significance that extends far beyond the Ukraine's borders. The facts that came to light are worth discussing in some detail.²⁶ Nineteen years ago, one Stanislav Panchyshyn, a doctor living in the west Ukrainian city of Lvov, apparently was approached by a Ukrainian nationalist emigré group via one of its supporters in Poland, a certain Tomasz Bilinski. Panchyshyn reported the overture to the KGB, which persuaded him to join the nationalists and serve as a double agent. Panchyshyn then "recruited" Iurii Ivanchenko, a Kiev journalist. Over the years, both men remained in close touch with the emigrés, receiving literature, money, photographic equipment, and other materials from clandestine couriers masked, presumably, as tourists. Some twenty other couriers were intercepted, and the KGB was able to acquire sensitive information about the nationalists and their operations.²⁷ Then suddenly, in September 1988, "Operation Boomerang" was exposed. The official explanation, provided by the key operative, Colonel Konstantyn Vysots'kyi, is, to say the least, implausible:

24 This and the following paragraph are taken virtually verbatim from Alexander J. Motyl, *Will the Non-Russians Rebel? State, Ethnicity, and Stability in the USSR* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 111.

25 Some scholars would dispute my evaluation of the Ukraine's strategic importance and give pride of place to Central Asia, whose rapidly growing population is thought to be on the verge of accepting Islamic fundamentalism. Everything is possible, of course, but for the foreseeable future the Ukraine will continue to be the largest and most important non-Russian republic. An argument by analogy may be useful: surely few analysts would disagree with the view that West Germany is far more central to Western Europe than, say, exotic Greece, or that Poland or East Germany is the linchpin of Eastern Europe, not fiery Bulgaria.

26 The details are drawn from "Prorakhuvalys'!" *Visti z Ukrayny*, No. 39 (September 1988), p. 7.

27 Two of these couriers may have been Iaroslav Dobosh and Andrew Klymchuk, who were caught "red-handed" in 1972 and 1977, respectively. Their activities were then used as pretexts for cracking down on dissidents.

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[The operation was ended because of] the change in the political climate of the world. We've introduced democratization and *glasnost'* into international relations. A process of nuclear disarmament has begun, political, economic, and tourist contacts between states and peoples are expanding. And in this situation it was quite natural, I'd even say important, to show the world who really wants peace and friendly contacts [viz., the USSR] and who wants to stop the process of improving international relations [the emigrés].²⁸

So saccharine an explanation — provided by a KGB counter-intelligence officer, no less — simply does not ring true. Why end what appears to have been so successful an operation? Significantly, Panchyshyn and Ivanchenko claimed that one of their major assignments had been to keep the emigrés informed of the activity of "Viacheslav Chornovil, Ivan Hel', Mykhailo Horyn', Mykhailo Osadchy, Ihor Kalynets', and other so-called 'fighters for human rights' and 'unrecognized activists' in literature and art."²⁹ This seemingly trivial detail explains the timing of the exposure. These very same individuals, all veterans of the earlier dissident movement, have led a *glasnost'*-era national revival in Lvov — a city that served as a Ukrainian Piedmont in both the 19th and 20th centuries — by publishing samizdat journals, organizing quasi-dissident groups, and, most worrisome from the point of view of the authorities, helping to launch a series of mass meetings in the summer of 1988.

As if that were not enough, the gatherings were heavily attended, attracting tens of thousands of people, and functioned as forums for the expression of critical sentiments that bordered on outright nationalism. At one such meeting, one of the new generation of dissidents, Ivan Makar, suggested that a planned monument to the victims of Stalinism also be dedicated to the post-war nationalist underground, with which the emigrés claim kinship and which the Soviet authorities rightly fear, both because it inflicted high casualties on Soviet troops and because it was a genuinely popular movement that still occupies an important place in the West Ukrainians' collective memory. The official media immediately pounced on Makar's slip and denounced him and his colleagues as dangerous "extremists," currently the preferred Soviet term for "enemies of the state."

Exposing Operation Boomerang was meant to discredit the dissidents by suggesting that theirs had been a long-lasting alliance with emigré subversives. But it was more than that as well. Since the initiative, both for the original operation and for its termination, must have come from KGB and Party authorities in Moscow, and not from Kiev, the press conference appears to have been a signal not only to Ukrainian dissidents, but to dissidents everywhere in the

USSR. Had the intention been merely to attack a group of troublemakers in a provincial city, there would have been no need for the hoopla that attended the conference in Kiev (why not Lvov?) and the extensive coverage given it in central newspapers, such as *Pravda*, *Izvestia*, *Trud*, and — of all places — *Sotsialisticheskai industriia*.³⁰ If this argument is valid, then Gorbachev's reputed toleration of the Baltic popular fronts, whose sentiments are far more "extremist" than those in Lvov, may have to be taken with a very large grain of salt.³¹ Indeed, Politburo member Aleksandr Iakovlev's skeptical view of Baltic developments, which he expressed in a *New York Times* interview, appears to substantiate this interpretation.³²

Several additional inferences can be drawn from the information provided at the press conference. First, timing aside, why end so profitable an operation at all? Why not discredit the dissidents in some less costly a manner? Evidently, because other KGB agents have managed to infiltrate the nationalist group, thereby making Panchyshyn and Ivanchenko expendable. If the KGB has its moles in so secretive an organization as that of the Ukrainian emigré nationalists, then it must be even better represented in all the groups in the USSR and abroad that eschew conspiracy.

Second, it is significant that Panchyshyn's recruitment occurred via Poland — a transparent hint that Eastern Europe functions as one of the major channels for "ideological sabotage" from the West. If even fraternal socialist states cannot be fully trusted, then the argument for the KGB as the only Soviet institution capable of protecting the Motherland from dastardly outside influence becomes all the stronger.

Third, the KGB's ability to infiltrate a manifestly anti-Soviet organization as well as to string it along for close to twenty years is surely an advertisement of its prowess, dedication, perseverance, and indispensability to Soviet security. Overall, then, the Kiev press conference was a signal, both to dissidents and to the public at large that, democratization and *glasnost'* notwithstanding, the Soviet system still needs the KGB — and will continue to need it as long as external enemies, dubious allies, and domestic turncoats pester the USSR.

The KGB Within the System

Gorbachev, for one, surely needs no reminding of the KGB's indispensability to Soviet stability. He must view with disquiet the explosive nature of popular mobilization in the Baltic republics, Armenia, Georgia, and Kazakhstan. And no matter what he or his comrades may say about the

28 *Visti z Ukrayny*, No. 39, p. 7.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

30 See *Pravda*, September 15, 1988; Lev Korneshov, "Kto est' kto. V zagranitsentre ounovtsev i chem zanimaetsia etot tsentr," *Izvestia*, September 15, 1988; V. Galenkin, "Privideniya s ulitsy Tseppelinstrasse," *Trud*, September 15, 1988; Zh. Tkachenko, "Natsionalisty terpiat proval," *Sotsialisticheskai industriia*, September 15, 1988.

31 See Bill Keller, "Estonia Ferment: Soviet Role Model or Exception?" *The New York Times*, October 4, 1988, p. A3.

32 "Words of a Gorbachev Aide: 'We Make Mistakes' and 'We Correct Them,'" *The New York Times*, October 28, 1988, p. A10.

usefulness of popular initiative or the irreversibility of *perestroika*, they cannot regard the activities of the Karabakh Committee or the Baltic popular fronts with equanimity. Calls for everything just short of independence may function to ventilate pent-up angers, but they are no less a threat to the very integrity of the Soviet system — and it is incredible to think that Gorbachev would play with something that important. He surely understands, now if not in 1985, that his program of reform is unleashing social and political forces that could, if unchecked, destabilize the Soviet system. And both Gorbachev and the KGB must realize that the secret police will be even more central to state stability in the future than in the past. Dealing with potentially dangerous internal opposition, managing the bourgeois world's inevitably growing corrosive influence, and neutralizing the attempts of imperialist secret services to subvert socialism — without undermining all of the liberalizing aspirations of *perestroika* — will require great finesse and close cooperation among all elements of the elite. And that means that the Party's alliance with the KGB is likely to strengthen rather than weaken in the foreseeable future — especially if, as seems likely in the wake of the Afghanistan debacle and of Gorbachev's manpower cuts, army morale and effectiveness decline and the KGB's supervision of the military grows in importance. To be sure, Gorbachev will see to it that the Party retains the upper hand and that the KGB stays out of politics, as indicated by his appointment of Kriuchkov, who is a career officer, Andropov protégé, and former head of the First Chief Directorate responsible for espionage abroad.³³ But none of this means that the KGB will withdraw from the political stage.

Consequently, it would be a mistake to think that Gorbachev's manifest desire to create a Soviet *Rechtstaat*, or a state based on the rule of law, threatens the *Polizeistaat*. Quite the contrary, a *Rechtstaat* undermines the position not of the KGB, which has occupied a clearly delineated place in the system since the 1950s, but of the middle and lower levels of the Party-state bureaucracy, which has long been inured to interfering unlawfully in the affairs of public institutions, the media, and scholarly and creative organizations. This supposition probably explains the piece in *Kommunist*, written by V. A. Rubanov, a section head of the KGB's Scientific Research Institute, who argued for loosening secrecy restrictions, as well as an *Izvestiia* interview with Kriuchkov, who promised an "expansion of democracy" and a reduction of secrecy in the KGB's operational methods.³⁴ Only a self-confident and institutionally secure organization would support a policy that, at first glance, seems to contradict everything it stands for and, to top it all off, have the cheek to present its daily activities as the embodiment of *glasnost'*. Naturally, Gorbachev does not want the KGB to

threaten *glasnost'* by intimidating the press, as was made clear in the scandal that surrounded the KGB's harassment of a Voroshilovgrad journalist, Viktor Berklin, in 1986. But KGB misbehavior was less at issue in the affair than Berklin's journalistic credentials: after all, why pick Berklin, when any number of writers, scholars, workers, or peasants could have served to make the point?

Contrary to the conventional wisdom, *perestroika* does not — and I suggest cannot — be premised on the KGB's exclusion or even its significant demotion within the system. Chebrikov's appointment to head the Central Committee Legal Policy Commission, along with his forceful emphasis in the *Pravda* interview that the secret police is actively taking part in drafting new laws, suggests as much.³⁵ And indeed, Chebrikov's Commission has been handling the preparations for the special Central Committee plenum on nationality relations planned for mid-summer 1989, and it was probably instrumental in drafting the more draconian version of the USSR Criminal Code of April 8, 1989.³⁶ Although a KGB officer in charge of legal policy may be analogous, as I. F. Stone insisted, to J. Edgar Hoover's rewriting the Bill of Rights, the point to remember is that the KGB is so large, important, and permanent a part of the Soviet one-party system that legal and political reform is unthinkable without its active participation. The alternative would be to change the laws *against* the KGB, a move that would violate the spirit of the Party's alliance with the secret police and probably undermine the restructuring of the legal system. Seen in this light, subordinating the KGB to the Supreme Soviet makes perfect sense: since the new legislature is the preserve of Gorbachev and the Party apparatus, the Party-KGB alliance will remain unchanged. Indeed, by being firmly embedded in a ramified legal structure, the KGB will acquire the *de jure* institutional status it has possessed *de facto* for so many years.

The Indispensable Institution

Paradoxically, the farther *perestroika* proceeds, the brighter the KGB's future. Besides being indispensable to Soviet stability, the KGB is ideally positioned to reap the benefits and avoid the pitfalls associated with rampant *glasnost'*. The KGB has a proven capacity to populate its ranks with sophisticated, educated, and ambitious individuals; it has always fulfilled its "quota" effectively, efficiently, and consistently; and it has been able to deal with dissent in a manner that was minimally disruptive to the system. Because the KGB is perhaps the most restructured of all Soviet institutions, *perestroika* cannot disrupt its operational procedures to any significant degree.

33 Knight, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-23.

34 *Izvestiia*, May 5, 1989, p. 1.

35 *Pravda*, September 2, 1988, p. 3; *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, No. 35, September 28, 1988, p. 4.

36 Alexander Rahr, "Who Is in Charge of the Party Apparatus?" *Report on the USSR*, April 14, 1989, pp. 21-22; *Pravda*, April 11, 1989, p. 1.

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The fact that the KGB came under severe attack in the 1950s and survived also enhances its position. Not only is the KGB a model of efficiency, it is also a model of how an inefficient organization should learn from criticism and restructure itself accordingly to meet the changing needs of the day. More important perhaps, having been subjected to scathing criticism in the past, today's KGB is more or less above reproach; at least it is not quite as susceptible to the kind of devastating attacks that have been levelled against bureaucrats in the Party and state apparatus. Its legitimacy having been shaken and restored, the KGB may be the only Soviet agency that cannot be criticized as an institution. (Naturally, individual operatives and illegalities may and will be criticized.) The Party can be blamed for most of the excesses of the sixties, seventies and early eighties, and rightfully so, since the Party set the tune. The state was stifling initiative, the military was incapable of winning a war against the mujahedin, while the population at large proved to be as sluggish as the system. In contrast, the KGB actually did the job assigned to it, and did it well. Seen in this light, continued revelations of Stalinist atrocities will function to discredit Stalinism — and its supporters in the bureaucracy and population — but not the KGB, which is a reformed post-Stalinist creature. Admittedly, rehabilitations of dissidents are unlikely to enhance the KGB's reputation, especially if, as in the case of Sakharov, they were talented writers, scholars, or artists. But because the vast majority of released prisoners of conscience are still consigned to the margins of society, the threat from this quarter is probably minimal. Interestingly, one such individual, the Armenian nationalist Paruir Airikian, was pushed past the margins and — shades of Brezhnev — deported to Ethiopia in mid-1988.

The KGB's institutional vitality and systemic indispensability should, in time, enhance its appeal to the Party and

consolidate their partnership, especially if the democratic and nationalist popular movements grow in strength and spread to other parts of the USSR. At some point, it is not inconceivable for some group to challenge Party authority directly or resort to violence in the pursuit of its ends. Such a scenario, which would have seemed fantastic several years ago, may become increasingly plausible as *perestroika* raises expectations, produces alienation, and tolerates organizational autonomy and popular mobilization — without being able to deliver the goods, economically and politically.³⁷ Although revolution is still impossible, mass disturbances are not, and only KGB intervention can prevent a Lithuania — or worse still, a Ukraine — from turning into a Czechoslovakia, a Poland, a Hungary, or even a China.

Ironically, the Party-KGB alliance is the major guarantee of *perestroika*'s viability as well as the major obstacle to its complete success. Continued KGB vitality will provide Gorbachev with both the talent and know-how required to transform the system without rocking the boat. On the other hand, as long as the KGB remains an autonomous institution entrusted with maintaining the Party's monopoly of power, *perestroika* will never be able to go as far as supporters of genuine democracy and national rights may wish. Although this scenario may dampen the enthusiasm of *perestroika*'s acolytes, there is no reason to despair. The USSR's transformation into a *Recht- und Polizeistaat* is, after all, a large step forward from the neo-totalitarianism of the Brezhnev period.

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³⁷ On the potentially revolutionary consequences of *perestroika*, see Alexander J. Motyl, "Conclusion," *Sovietology, Rationality, Nationality: Coming to Grips with Nationalism in the USSR*, unpublished manuscript, 1989.